

# Concho Valley Horticulture Update

October 2019

## Fall and Winter Vegetables

It's still hot, but fall weather will come eventually – right? I sure hope so! When it does cool down, it will be a great time to plant cool season vegetables. We are lucky that in the Texas climate we are able to grow food pretty much any time of year, we just need to adjust the crops based on the season. Warm season crops like tomatoes, squash, cucumber and peppers can do really well in the fall before the first freeze of November but have to be planned ahead of time and get planted in the late summer. Then when temperatures start to drop, it will soon be time to focus on winter crops like spinach, kale, and carrots– for the most part, all the leafy greens and root crops.

Some of the cool season fall- and winter-planted vegetables that we can grow include artichoke, asparagus, beet, bok choy, broccoli, brussels sprout, cabbage, carrot, cauliflower, chard, collard greens, garlic, kale, kohlrabi, leek, lettuce, mustard, onion, snap pea, radish, shallot, spinach, and turnip. What a list! There is something there for just about any household to enjoy. And these cool season crops don't have to be planted in a large garden plot, they can also be incorporated into the existing flower beds around to home. Many of them are very showy and pretty, bringing some fresh greenery to an otherwise dormant winter landscape.

Most should be planted around late September through early November, and again in February. Although some can be planted any time – even in the middle of winter. Radish, spinach, lettuce, kale, and chard are particularly cold hardy and even young new plants can handle cold weather. Onions should be planted around October if starting from seed, and sets (transplants) are planted in January. Asparagus crowns should be planted in January. For more info on growing a specific crop, visit <https://aggie-horticulture.tamu.edu/vegetable/> to see a list of helpful info sheets. Start looking at the different crop options and choose a few to include in the home landscape - plant next month to enjoy some home-grown healthy food!

Learn more about growing vegetables (as well as fruits and herbs) – and what to cook with them – by joining us for a Backyard Basics seminar series next month. Thursdays in October from 6pm to 8pm at the Tom Green 4-H Center there will be classes on fruit trees, vegetables, herbs, and a salsa/jam workshop. All the classes will focus on what we can grow in the Concho Valley, how to grow it, and will feature recipe demos and tastings. See included flyer for more info and call 325-659-6522 to sign up.

## October To-Do's

- Harvest cold-sensitive herbs such as basil
- Plant cool season annuals (later half of the month)
- Adjust irrigation schedule for cooler weather
- Plant trees, shrubs and vines

## Pecan Update



Pecan Weevil: Pecan weevil can still be an issue in areas with weevil that have drought hardened soils which can result in a drought delayed emergence.

Producers with adult emergence traps should monitor traps until the latest maturing cultivar has reached shuck split.

## Small Broken Twigs in Trees

I often get questions about what causes twigs and small branches in a tree to die and either hang in the tree or fall to the ground. This is a symptom called flagging, and when you stand further away from the tree you can see small patches of brown dead leaves. There are multiple things that can cause this, but two of the more common causes in the Concho Valley include squirrels and a twig girdler beetle.

In the spring and summer, this kind of damage is more commonly caused by squirrels. Arborists have some ideas of why they think squirrels do this, such as young ones gnawing to sharpen their teeth, or to get moisture when it's hot and dry, but there isn't a proven reason. There isn't a good control option either, but though some trees might look bad with several small dead spots this kind of damage isn't lethal or even very damaging to the tree.

In the fall, the damage is more often caused by twig girdler beetles. The adult female lays eggs in the twig, then moves backward a bit and goes round and round the twig chewing in a circle. With the bark and cambium layer underneath damaged, the twig dies from that point on and dries up. Eventually

ly the twig falls to the ground and the eggs develop inside, feeding on dead wood.

Twig girdlers are also not lethal to trees and very rarely cause any kind of permanent damage. It's not possible to treat the tree to prevent them because the timing is so specific it's not feasible to apply insecticide. If you would like to reduce this kind of damage in the future, just rake up and destroy all the fallen twigs or bag them up and throw away.



## Plant Spotlight

### Western Soapberry

*Sapindus saponaria* var. *drummondii*

Small to medium sized native tree, can grow from 10 to 50 feet tall. Cream colored flower clusters in the early summer turn to interesting looking translucent (poisonous) fruit in the fall. Attractive and hardy tree for the Concho Valley.





## Plants for Shady Spots

Living in hot, dry west Texas, we know how wonderful shade trees can be. They are great for keeping the home cool and making it enjoyable to be outside. But the shade can make it difficult to have perennial color. Most perennials flower best in full sun, especially drought tolerant ones, and while there are several annual flowers for shade, perennials are less common. It is also hard to grow turfgrass in the shade.

Many people have bare spots in the lawn underneath shade trees where even shade tolerant St. Augustine grass will not grow. If you have this problem and want to fix it, you have two options - thin the canopy of the tree by removing a few select branches to allow more filtered sunlight through, or choose different plants. Live oak trees are usually the biggest issue with shade, as they cast very deep shade around their trunks.

I recommend turning these shady areas of the turf into groundcover beds or planting beds with plants that tolerate more shade, or even just using a wood based mulch around tree trunks.

Now for color – one of the common questions I get asked is what perennials will do well in shade and bloom a lot. While there are more limited options for bright colorful blooms in shade than in sun, if you plan carefully and look hard there are some good options for us.

Some of these include: daffodil, spider lily, Texas gold columbine, oxalis, sweet autumn clematis, Turk's cap, American beautyberry, dwarf Mexican petunia, purple heart, and vinca.

Finally, there are many evergreens and foliage plants that do well in shade, ranging from shrubs like indian hawthorn and yaupon holly to groundcovers like liriope and Asian jasmine, to leafy perennials like holly fern and cast iron plant.

## Plant Spring Bulbs and Wildflowers

Fall is the time of year to plant spring blooming wildflowers and bulbs. Consider spreading some spring wildflower seeds like bluebonnets and planting some bulbs like daffodils now to have bright, showy spring color. It takes a while to see the result of the efforts, but it's worth it and is always a nice surprise when they pop up after months of being almost forgotten.

Some spring bulbs are considered an annual in the southern climate because it doesn't get cold enough to set flowers after the first year. Tulips, for example, will bloom nicely the first spring, but if left in place will just send up green leaves the following years. Daffodils are a great spring bulb for Texas because they do naturalize and re-bloom each year, so try to find those and other bulbs that are better suited to warm climates like grape hyacinths and snowflakes.

Generally, bulbs will perform best if planted in plenty of sunlight and well-drained soil. If soil is heavy and has poor drainage, amend with compost before planting. Plant at the correct depth, which should be listed on the label but is about 2 to 3 times the width of the bulb. Mulch can be applied after planting to help with weed control but should be moved out of the way when shoots begin to emerge. If left in place, the mulch can cause the stems to be pale and distorted.

For successful wildflower establishment, be sure to get seeds from a reliable source. Seed should be fresh to ensure good germination, so purchase from a reliable company. If planting in flower beds, remove any weeds and lightly till the soil. Good soil-to-seed contact is important for good germination, so try to loosen up the soil if possible.

If planting a variety of seeds with different sizes, mix them one-part seed to four-parts sand in order to have even distribution. A simple handheld fertilizer spreader can be used. Once the seeds are spread, tamp them down and water them in lightly (if planted when not raining).

Throughout the fall and winter, try to pull broadleaf weeds to prevent them from competing with the wildflowers. Some good wildflowers to plant in the Concho Valley include Mexican hat, black-eyed Susan, bluebonnet, Indian blanket and coreopsis.

## Controlling Khakiweed

Some of the most common questions I receive from homeowners are about identifying and controlling khakiweed. Khakiweed is a broadleaf, warm-season perennial plant that grows low to the ground in a flattened out, prostrate manner; it has small white flowers in the summer that develop into prickly burs in the fall. The burs break apart into small 'spears' that can easily attach to animals, clothes, shoes and equipment. Khakiweed has a thick, deep taproot that helps it survive drought, and it can be challenging to control.

The number one factor in keeping khakiweed at bay is to have something to occupy the ground space – it thrives in bare spots and thinned out turf. Whether it be a thick healthy lawn, deep mulch, groundcover, etc., there needs to be something to intentionally cover the ground to reduce weed growth. This can really help prevent new khakiweed from coming up, but here are some suggestions for controlling existing plants and other ideas to help with prevention.

First, use gloved hands or a garden hoe to physically pull up large, mature plants – be sure to get the taproot. Herbicide will not be very effective at killing fully grown plants. For smaller, actively growing young plants a herbicide that contains a combination of several active ingredients is more effective than just a 2,4-D broadleaf weed killer. Try a product that has a combination of 2,4-D with mecoprop, carfentrazone, dicamba, or metsulfuron (for example, Fertilome brand 'Weed Free Zone').

Since khakiweed is a perennial, meaning it comes back from roots, pre-emergent will not fully control it; but pre-emergent is still very helpful if applied in the late winter (around February) to prevent new plants from coming up by seed. There are no pre-emergent herbicides labeled for khakiweed specifically, but a Texas A&M bulletin written by Scott Nolte, David Graf and Becky Trammel recommends trying a product with the active ingredient isoxaben (for example, trade name 'Gallery'). See <https://tomgreen.agrilife.org/horticulture/> to view the full publication. Always follow label directions when using any type of weed killer product.

Another tip - don't scalp the lawn or mow too low, as this plant loves to grow out flat on the open ground. Raise the mower a and cut the grass a little higher so the turf can shade it out. In summary, now is the time of year when khakiweed begins to be the most troublesome because the burs really start to develop – but control efforts need to start in the late winter with pre-emergent, and early spring with broadleaf herbicide when the plants are still small.

## Landscaping to Conserve Energy

Most everyone knows that you can save water with carefully planned landscaping, but it's also possible to promote energy conservation through well designed landscapes. Properly placed trees, shrubs and vines can do a lot to help with energy conservation in the home and reduce the energy needed to cool and heat the home.

First is shading the home to keep it cool in the summer. Choose large, deciduous shade trees and if possible, plant a large tree on each side of the home. But do some research and find out the size and shape they will be when fully mature, so you can plant in the right spots to provide the best shade for the home.

Watch out for overhead utility lines and underground lines, and don't plant the trees too close to windows or they will block the view.

Evergreen shrubs planted around the perimeter will also help shade and cool the home and provide a nice backdrop for other ornamental plants.

Now for saving energy in the winter. Winter is why the summer shade trees should be deciduous, and lose their leaves in the winter; this will allow sunlight through to warm the home. Then the next thing to consider is planting a wind break. The evergreen shrubs you planted to cool the home in the summer will also help block wind in the winter time.

If those aren't enough to protect from the wind, think about planting a windbreak line of trees or tall shrubs to block prevailing winds.

This is a great time of year for planting trees and shrubs, so if you want to try saving money on energy costs you might think carefully about planting some deciduous shade trees and evergreen shrubs for energy conservation.

# Upcoming Events

October 2019

Thursdays in October, 6:00pm-8:00pm

## **Backyard Basics Seminar Series**

**Location:** Tom Green 4-H Center, 3168 N US Highway 67, San Angelo (next to animal shelter)

Cost: See flyer

Speakers: Allison Watkins, Courtney Redman

Learn about growing home fruit, vegetables and herbs—plus what to do with them after you harvest! Recipe demos at each seminar. See included flyer for details, and call to RSVP: 325-659-6522.

Thursday, October 17, 2:00pm-4:00pm

## **Green Thumb Seminar—Fairy Gardens**

**\*\*NEW\*\* Location:** People/Plant Connection: 416 South Oaks St., San Angelo

Cost: \$20

Speaker: Susan Stanfield

Hosted by the People/Plant Connection; Learn about creating beautiful miniature gardens, supplies provided to create your own fairy garden to take home! To RSVP, call Susan at 325-656-3104

Friday, October 18, 12:00pm

## **Lunch N Learn Class - Attracting Butterflies to the Landscape**

**\*\*NEW\*\* Location:** People/Plant Connection: 416 South Oaks St., San Angelo

Cost: \$5

Speaker: Allison Watkins

Hosted by the People/Plant Connection; butterflies and beautiful and beneficial to the landscape and garden. Learn about some of the plants to use to attract them. For more info call Susan at 325-656-3104

## *Save the Date:*

Saturday, November 2, 10:00am to 12:00pm

## **Pumpkin Fest**

**Location:** Tom Green 4-H Center, 3168 N US Highway 67, San Angelo (next to animal shelter)

Hosted by the People/Plant Connection; Join us for fall pumpkin fun! See attached flyer, for more info call Susan at 325-656-3104

For more information on any of the topics, or to ask questions please contact:



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